

O 181221Z FEB 09
FM AMEMBASSY COLOMBO
TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 9395
INFO AMEMBASSY ATHENS
AMEMBASSY BANGKOK
AMEMBASSY DHAKA
AMEMBASSY ISLAMABAD
AMEMBASSY KATHMANDU
AMEMBASSY LONDON
AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI
AMEMBASSY OSLO
AMEMBASSY TOKYO
AMCONSUL CHENNAI
AMCONSUL MUMBAI
AMCONSUL TORONTO
USEU BRUSSELS
USMISSION USUN NEW YORK
USMISSION GENEVA
HQ USPACOM HONOLULU HI
DIA WASHINGTON DC
NATIONAL SECURITY COUNCIL WASHINGTON DC
SECDEF WASHDC
CDRUSARPAC FT SHAFTER HI//APCW/APOP//
CDR USPACOM HONOLULU HI//J3/J332/J52//

UNCLAS COLOMBO 000173

SENSITIVE

STATE FOR SCA (BOUCHER, CAMP), SCA/INS AND PRM
STATE ALSO PASS USAID
AID/W FOR ANE/SCA, DCHA/FFP (DWORKEN, KSHEIN)
AID/W FOR DCHA/OFDA (MORRISP, ACONVERY, RTHAYER, RKERR)
ATHENS FOR PCARTER
BANGKOK FOR USAID/DCHA/OFDA (ADWYER)
KATHMANDU FOR USAID/DCHA/OFDA (WBERGER) AND POL (SBERRY)
GENEVA FOR RMA (NKYLOH, NHILGERT, MPITOTTI)
USUN NEW YORK FOR ECOSOC (D MERCADO)
SECDEF FOR OSD - POLICY
PACOM ALSO FOR J-5

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [MOPS](#) [PREF](#) [PHUM](#) [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [ASEC](#) [CE](#)

SUBJECT: Northern Sri Lanka SitRep 15: Heavy Fighting Continues; UN
Launches Appeal; Food Aid Delivered to Vanni

Ref: A) Colombo 166, B) Colombo 157, C) Colombo 152, D) Colombo
149, E) Colombo 148, F) Colombo 145, G) Colombo 140, H) Colombo 138,
I) Colombo 133, J) Colombo 130, K) Colombo 129, L) Colombo 127, M)
Colombo 125, N) Colombo 124, O) Colombo 116, P) Colombo 109, Q)
Colombo 108

Heavy Fighting in PTK; Army Claims No More Use of Indirect Fire

¶1. (SBU) Defense Secretary Gotabhaya Rajapaksa informed Ambassador
and DATT on February 17 that the military has now occupied almost
all the former safe zone and is now engaged in house to house combat
with the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) in
Puthukkuduyiruppu (PTK) town. LTTE continues to put up heavy
resistance. He also informed Ambassador that the military has
stopped using "indirect fire" (artillery, mortars or tanks) in part
so it does not kill its own troops as the front lines converge on
the shrinking area still under rebel control. The Sri Lankan army
has now progressed north of the A-35 road (Paranthan-Mullaitivu).

UN Releases Appeal; Government Announces Food Shipments

¶2. (U) Ambassador and USAID Mission Director attended the Colombo
launch of the UN Consolidated Humanitarian Action Plan (CHAP) on
February 18. The UN seeks \$155M to support both emergency needs of
internally-displaced persons (IDPs) in the North as well as ongoing
assistance for IDP returns in the East. UN seeks \$75 M to provide
urgent humanitarian assistance in the next three months. Some
35,000 IDPs have arrived in Vavuniya, Mannar and Jaffna since
January 1, and UN agencies continue to prepare for a major outflow.
Senior Advisor to the President (and MP) Basil Rajapaksa attended

the launch. He confirmed that a 40-ton shipment of food via an ICRC-flagged vessel arrived in the safe zone on February 17, and announced the Government's commitment to provide 80-100 MTs per day to civilians trapped by the fighting, via a tug that will be dedicated to the task. He further noted that medicine would be included in the next shipment.

¶3. (U) Ambassador commended the Government for its plans to resettle 80% of IDPs by the end of 2009, but noted U.S. and other donors' concern that the GSL has not given the ICRC access to monitor the military's screening and registration of IDPs. Rajapaksa initially indicated ICRC would only register those released to its custody (i.e. medical evacuees). The Ambassador pressed Rajapaksa to allow ICRC monitoring of Government registration of all IDPs in the Vanni, noting reports of disappearances. (Post will provide a full readout of the CHAP septel.)

LTTE Criticizes UN

¶4. (SBU) The LTTE lashed out in response to the public statements of UN Resident Coordinator Neil Buhne on February 16 (Ref A), blaming the UN of attempting to hide "their own failures" by leveling criticism on others (i.e., the LTTE). The LTTE relief agency, Tamils Rehabilitation Organization, blamed the UN for "withdrawing even the remaining few local staff from the conflict zone [and]

completely shedding its responsibility of caring for the civilians trapped here." The pro-LTTE website TamilNet quoted LTTE Political Head B. Nadesan stating, "the UN is engaged in fruitless exercises of accusing the wrong side, without coming and seeing what is happening by themselves."

Civilian Casualties Continue

¶5. (SBU) UN sources reported shelling in the new safe zone on February 18 with "large numbers of casualties." The Sri Lankan Army (SLA) denies they delivered the fire. The UN noted it could not be ruled out that the LTTE shelled civilian areas to assign blame to the SLA.

¶6. (U) Tamil National Alliance (TNA) parliamentary group leader R. Sampanthan delivered a statement to the press at the Sri Lankan parliamentary complex assailing the "slaughter of Tamil civilians through indiscriminate artillery barrage and bombings." He further claimed that 2000 Tamil civilians have been killed and 4500 injured since mid-December.

¶7. (SBU) Tamil sources from within the LTTE-controlled area claim 156 civilians killed and 149 injured on February 17-18 in PTK area. (Note: Such reports from Tamil sources cannot be confirmed and are frequently exaggerated.)

BLAKE